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Page: 228

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PTQ2106

PAGE 01 MADRID 06970 01 OF 02 271500Z
ACTION EUR-01

INFO LOG-00 CIAE-00 INL-01 DODE-00 WHA-01 DS-00 UTED-00
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P 271437Z JUL 99
FM AMEMBASSY MADRID
TO USIA WASHDC PRIORITY 0356
INFO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5478
ALL EUROPEAN UNION POST COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
CFSC ARA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY 0001
AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY
AMCONSUL BARCELONA

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MADRID 006970

USIA

USIA FOR WEU (MEES, MACCURDY)
SECSTATE FOR EUR/P, EUR/WE, EUR/USIA

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PGOV, PNAT, OPRC, SP, VE, XM
SUBJECT: ALL POWER TO HUGO CHAVEZ! -- SPANISH PRESS
REPORTS AND EDITORIAL COMMENT (7/27/99)

1. "CHAVEZ TAKES ABSOLUTE POWER AS VENEZUELA'S BOSS"
("CHAVEZ SE ALZA CON EL PODER ABSOLUTO COMO CAUDILLO DE
UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 02 MADRID 06970 01 OF 02 271500Z
VENEZUELA"), WAS HOW BARCELONA'S CENTRIST LA VANGUARDIA
BANNERED THE VENEZUELAN PRESIDENT'S LATEST VICTORY AT
THE POLLS, FOLLOWED BY THIS SUB-HEAD: "THE PRESIDENT'S
LANDSLIDE VICTORY HANDS HIM COMPLETE CONTROL OF THE
CONSTITUTIONAL ASSEMBLY ENABLING HIM TO LIQUIDATE THE
OLD PARTY SYSTEM."

2. VANGUARDIA'S FRONT-PAGE SUMMARY ARTICLE NOTED, IN
PART, THAT: "... WITH HIS OVERWHELMING TRIUMPH, CHAVEZ
TAKES PRACTICALLY ABSOLUTE CONTROL OF THE COUNTRY AND
WILL BE ABLE TO FURTHER HIS PLAN TO 'REFOUND THE
FATHERLAND' AND TO LIQUIDATE THE DISCREDITED
TRADITIONAL PARTY SYSTEM. FROM NOW ON, CHAVEZ RUNS A
RACE AGAINST TIME TO INSPIRE INVESTOR CONFIDENCE AND
RESTORE THE COUNTRY'S PRODUCTIVE CAPACITY. AFTER HIS

n/a

UNCLASSIFIED

Page

UNCLASSIFIED

LANDSLIDE VICTORY, THE PRESIDENT MUST KEEP HIS PROMISES TO BRING ABOUT CHANGE AND INSTITUTIONAL TRANSFORMATION WHILE AT THE SAME TIME GRAPPLING WITH A SERIOUS ECONOMIC CRISIS THAT HAS SEEN A 9.8 PERCENT SHRINKAGE IN GDP."

3. A PAGE 3 ARTICLE BY VANGUARDIA'S SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT JOAQUIM IBARZ, DATELINED CARACAS, IN PART ADVISED THAT: "PRESIDENT CHAVEZ HAS ANNOUNCED SOME KEY FEATURES OF THE NEW CONSTITUTION. HE WILL PROPOSE THAT IN ITS FIRST ARTICLE VENEZUELA'S NAME BE CHANGED TO THE BOLIVARIAN REPUBLIC OF VENEZUELA. HE ALSO FORESAW REFORMING THE DECENTRALIZATION PROCESS IN ORDER TO AVOID 'REGIONAL ANARCHY' AND TO PROVIDE FOR THE RECALL OF ELECTED OFFICIALS DOING A POOR JOB VIA REFERENDUMS. THE NEW CONSTITUTION WILL ALSO ADD A 'MORAL BRANCH' TO

UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 03 MADRID 06970 01 OF 02 271500Z
THE THREE TRADITIONAL BRANCHES OF GOVERNMENT WHOSE MANDATE WILL BE TO FIGHT CORRUPTION AND DEFEND THE INTERESTS OF THE PEOPLE. A FIFTH BRANCH WILL BE THE 'ELECTORAL BRANCH' WHICH, ACCORDING TO CHAVEZ, WILL REMAIN IN THE HANDS OF THE PEOPLE."

4. LEADING CIRCULATION LIBERAL DAILY EL PAIS ALSO ACCORDED CHAVEZ'S VICTORY TOP BILLING ON ITS JULY 27 FRONT PAGE: "CHAVEZ WINS 120 OF THE 131 DELEGATES TO THE NEW VENEZUELAN CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION." EL PAIS RAN SEVERAL ARTICLES ON PAGE 2 AND 3 PROVIDING FURTHER DETAILS ON THE ELECTION OUTCOME PLUS AN ARTICLE BY J. M. LARRAYA, DATELINED CARACAS, UNDER THIS CAPTION: "[SPANISH PM JOSE MARIA] AZNAR PHONED CHAVEZ FROM PORTUGAL TO CONGRATULATE HIM." THE ARTICLE READS, IN PERTINENT PART: "ACCORDING TO CHAVEZ, AZNAR CALLED HIM FROM PORTUGAL [WHERE HE WAS MEETING PRIVATELY WITH PM GUTERRES] ... AND EXPRESSED INCREDULITY AT THE SIZE OF THE ELECTION VICTORY, TO WHICH CHAVEZ REPLIED: 'I COULDN'T BELIEVE IT MYSELF LAST NIGHT. IT WAS A GREAT VICTORY, HISTORIC.' SOURCES CLOSE TO AZNAR REVEALED THAT DURING HIS VISIT TO VENEZUELA [HE LEARNED THAT] DURING CHAVEZ'S FIRST MONTHS IN OFFICE, HE HAD NOT ONLY SURVIVED ATTEMPTS ON HIS LIFE BUT HAD ALSO BEEN OFFERED BRIBES TO ABANDON HIS REFORM PLANS."

5. OTHER MAJOR DAILIES (CONSERVATIVE ABC, LA RAZON AND INDEPENDENT EL MUNDO) RAN STORIES ALONG SIMILAR LINES. ALL MAJOR SPANISH DAILIES ALSO PROVIDED EDITORIAL COMMENT, MOSTLY PESSIMISTIC IN NATURE, ON CHAVEZ'S ELECTORAL VICTORY. USIS/MADRID'S FREE SUMMARY

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED
n/a

Page: 230

UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 04 MADRID 06970 01 OF 02 271500Z
TRANSLATIONS OF THOSE JULY 27 OPINION PIECES FOLLOW.

6. "ALMIGHTY CHAVEZ" -- LIBERAL EL PAIS OBSERVED:
"THE OVERWHELMING VICTORY OF HUGO CHAVEZ'S CANDIDATES
IN THE ELECTION HELD TO SELECT DELEGATES TO A
CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION HAS HANDED THE VENEZUELAN
PRESIDENT A HUGE BLANK CHECK. THIS RENEWED VOTE OF
CONFIDENCE BY THE CITIZENRY IN THE FORMER PARATROOPER
WHO WAS ELECTED PRESIDENT LAST DECEMBER -- THE FOURTH
ELECTION VICTORY HE HAS WON IN EIGHT MONTHS --
DEMONSTRATES HOW DEEPLY VENEZUELAN RESSENT THE RECORD
OF THE TWO TRADITIONAL PARTIES THAT TOOK TURNS IN
OFFICE OVER THE LAST FOUR DECADES AND PLUNDERED THE
TREASURY OF THE WORLD'S THIRD LARGEST OIL EXPORTING
NATION."

7. "CHAVEZ'S COUPS" -- BARCELONA'S CENTRIST LA
VANGUARDIA COMMENTED: "... CHAVEZ, WHO TRIED TO PULL
OFF A COUP D'ETAT AGAINST PRESIDENT CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ
IN 1992, ASSERTS THAT HE WILL 'TRANSFORM' VENEZUELAN
DEMOCRACY 'WITHOUT COUPS.' BUT HE HAS ALREADY STRUCK

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UNCLASSIFIED PTQ2109

PAGE 01 MADRID 06970 02 OF 02 271500Z
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SAS-00 /005W

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P 271437Z JUL 99
FM AMEMBASSY MADRID
TO USIA WASHDC PRIORITY 0357
INFO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5479
ALL EUROPEAN UNION POST COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
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SEVERAL BLOWS AS WHEN, NOT LONG AGO, HE DEFIED CONGRESS
BY PROMOTING 34 MILITARY MEN WHO HAD JOINED IN HIS

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PAGE 02 MADRID 06970 02 OF 02 271500Z
FAILED COUP ATTEMPT. AND HE IS ALREADY CHANGING
VENEZUELA'S DEMOCRACY BY WINNING ONE ELECTION AFTER
ANOTHER.... VOTER ABSENTEEISM IN THE LAST TWO
ELECTIONS (61 PERCENT IN APRIL AND 53 PERCENT LAST
SUNDAY) FAILS TO DETRACT FROM HIS LEGITIMACY, ALTHOUGH
IT DOES DEMONSTRATE THAT THE COUNTRY HAS A
DISQUIETINGLY DIVIDED ELECTORATE."

8. "CHAVEZ 'RECONSTRUCTS' HIS COUNTRY" -- INDEPENDENT
EL MUNDO OBSERVED: "... THE ELECTION LANDSLIDE CONFERS
A DEGREE OF DEMOCRATIC LEGITIMACY ON CHAVEZ NOT
FORECAST EITHER IN OPINION POLLS OR BY HIS OWN PARTY.
BUT THAT LEGITIMACY COULD BECOME A TWO-EDGED SWORD THAT
CUTS A SWATH TOWARDS DICTATORSHIP SHOULD CHAVEZ CHOOSE
TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE ELECTION RESULTS IN ORDER TO
ELIMINATE DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS SUCH AS THE CONGRESS
AND RULE BY DECREE. GIVEN HIS HISTORY OF COUP
ATTEMPTS, THIS IS A POSSIBILITY FEARED BY MANY."

9. "RISKY VICTORY" -- CONSERVATIVE ABC REMARKED:
"... THE PRESIDENT HAS 120 OF THE 131 DELEGATES ELECTED
TO THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION AND CAN NOW DRAFT A
DOCUMENT TO HIS LIKING. HE CAN ALSO ASSUME ALL THE
POWERS OF STATE, SOMETHING SEEN AS MORE THAN LIKELY.
POPULIST GOVERNMENTS HAVE A WAY OF SIMPLY TURNING INTO
DICTATORSHIPS, AND THIS IS THE PRINCIPAL RISK THAT
CHAVEZ'S VICTORY ENTAILS. IN DECEMBER, VENEZUELA TOOK
A STEP TOWARDS POPULISM. LAST SUNDAY IT TOOK ANOTHER
TOWARDS DICTATORSHIP. LET US HOPE IT WAS NOT THE FINAL
CHANGE OF DIRECTION."

UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 03 MADRID 06970 02 OF 02 271500Z
10. "THE REPUBLIC IS DEAD; LONG LIVE CHAVEZ!" --
CONSERVATIVE LA RAZON JUDGED: "... THE ELECTION RESULTS
SHOULD BE SEEN FOR WHAT THEY ARE: A VOTE THAT PUNISHED
THE TRADITIONAL POLITICAL CLASS. CHAVEZ OFFERS

LEADERSHIP, ECONOMIC GROWTH, AND THE POSSIBILITY OF BEING RE-ELECTED TO A LONGER TERM IN OFFICE. AMONG OTHER THINGS, HE WANTS TO BE ABLE TO DISMISS GOVERNORS, MAYORS, AND GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES -- LIKE FUJIMORI OR ANY OTHER DICTATOR OF SAD MEMORY. CHAVEZ HAS DEMOCRATICALLY OBTAINED ALL THE POWERS OF THE STATE THROUGH THE VOTES OF HIS PEOPLE. IT IS TO BE HOPED HE DOES NOT ASSUME THEY WILL BE HIS FOREVER."
BARBARO, ACTING

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